

The Nexus Between Political Corruption and Instant Wealth Aspiration: A Study of Their Contribution to Nigeria's Underdevelopment.

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ABSTRACT

This Journal article investigates the complex relationship between political corruption and the widespread aspiration for instant wealth in Nigeria, with a focus on how both phenomena interact to perpetuate national underdevelopment. Nigeria has long struggled with leadership failures marked by embezzlement, patronage, and systemic misgovernance. Simultaneously, a growing segment of the population particularly the youth has embraced a get-rich-quick mentality that undermines productivity, ethical standards, and civic responsibility. Drawing on Social Learning Theory and Institutional Decay Theory, this study explores how corrupt leadership models influence public attitudes toward wealth accumulation, encouraging citizens to prioritize material success over merit, integrity, or legal means. The research adopts a qualitative descriptive approach, utilizing secondary data from policy documents, media reports, and academic literature to analyze patterns of behavior, institutional response, and cultural norms. Findings reveal a vicious cycle where leadership corruption and societal moral compromise reinforce each other, resulting in weakened institutions, eroded trust, and stalled development efforts. The normalization of corruption across both elite and grassroots levels fosters a national environment where unethical practices are rewarded, and accountability is minimal. The study concludes that meaningful progress in Nigeria requires a dual approach: institutional reform to hold public officials accountable and a value reorientation campaign to challenge the societal obsession with fast wealth. Addressing one without the other will only produce superficial change. The article offers actionable policy recommendations aimed at disrupting this cycle and promoting long-term national development rooted in integrity, service, and civic responsibility.

Key words: *Nexus Between, Political Corruption, Instant Wealth Aspiration, Contribution, Underdevelopment.*

1. INTRODUCTION

Nigeria, widely referred to as the “Giant of Africa,” is blessed with vast natural and human resources, a dynamic youth population, and enormous economic potential. However, the country continues to struggle with chronic underdevelopment. Indicators such as widespread poverty, high unemployment, infrastructural decay, insecurity, and weak institutions paint a bleak picture of a nation that has failed to realize its potential. Despite numerous reform efforts, development remains stagnant. This persistent failure is largely driven by two interlinked and mutually reinforcing forces: entrenched political corruption and a growing societal obsession with instant wealth acquisition. Political corruption in Nigeria has become a systemic problem. From military regimes to democratic administrations, public office has often been exploited for personal enrichment. Embezzlement of public funds, contract inflation, vote-buying, patronage networks, and the misuse of public institutions for private gain have become normalized within the political class. These practices erode public trust, weaken governance, and redirect resources meant for development into private hands. Concurrently, Nigerian society has increasingly adopted a culture that glorifies quick wealth, regardless of its source. Many citizens, especially young people, have internalized the belief that success is defined by material acquisition rather than hard work or merit. This mindset has birthed a troubling trend of cybercrime (e.g., Yahoo Yahoo), ritual killings, internet fraud, and political thuggery all in pursuit of rapid financial success. Importantly, this behavior is not merely a reflection of societal moral decline but a reaction to the patterns modeled by corrupt elites who rise to prominence without consequence. The interaction between corrupt leadership and a get-rich-quick mentality has created a self-sustaining cycle of underdevelopment. While corrupt leaders set poor examples from the top, citizens at the bottom emulate and normalize unethical behavior, creating a nationwide environment where integrity,

transparency, and accountability are devalued. This article explores this dangerous nexus, arguing that Nigeria’s development crisis cannot be resolved without a simultaneous confrontation of both elite corruption and mass value disorientation. Understanding this relationship is crucial to formulating sustainable policy solutions that target the root causes of the country’s developmental stagnation.

1.1 Background to the Study

Nigeria, widely referred to as the “Giant of Africa,” is endowed with abundant natural and human resources, a vibrant youth population, and considerable economic potential. Despite these advantages, the country remains trapped in a cycle of chronic underdevelopment. Widespread poverty, high unemployment rates, infrastructural collapse, insecurity, and weak institutional frameworks persist as troubling indicators of a nation struggling to realize its potential. Over the decades, numerous policy reforms and development programs have been launched, yet progress remains elusive. A major factor in this stagnation is the prevalence of political corruption, deeply embedded in the Nigerian polity. From military dictatorships to democratic governments, political leadership has often served personal interests rather than national goals. Embezzlement of public funds, contract inflation, electoral malpractice, patronage systems, and manipulation of state institutions have become entrenched practices. This institutionalized corruption has eroded public trust and diverted critical resources away from national development. Compounding this issue is a widespread societal obsession with quick wealth acquisition. An increasing number of Nigerians, especially youth, measure success by material wealth rather than merit, education, or hard work. This attitude has normalized vices such as cybercrime, ritual killings, political thuggery, and internet fraud. The behavior is not isolated but reflects the poor examples set by elites who attain wealth and status through corrupt means without facing legal consequences. The interplay between elite corruption and mass value disorientation

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forms a vicious cycle that perpetuates underdevelopment. This study seeks to explore this dynamic, arguing that any meaningful development in Nigeria must begin with a simultaneous reform of leadership accountability and societal value reorientation.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Despite decades of reforms, Nigeria continues to experience minimal progress in key developmental sectors. The root of this stagnation lies not only in institutional weaknesses but also in the pervasive influence of political corruption and societal moral erosion. Political leaders frequently exploit their positions for personal gain, while the populace increasingly embraces unethical means to attain financial success. This interrelationship creates a self-perpetuating cycle of impunity and decay, where development policies are undermined from both the top and the bottom. Without addressing these twin problems simultaneously, efforts at economic recovery and institutional reform will remain ineffective.

1.3 Research Objectives

The main objective of this study is to examine the interconnectedness of political corruption and the societal obsession with instant wealth as core drivers of Nigeria's underdevelopment. The specific objectives are to:

1. Analyze the historical and systemic nature of political corruption in Nigeria.
2. Examine the socio-cultural factors fueling the obsession with quick wealth.
3. Explore how these two forces reinforce each other in undermining development.
4. Identify the consequences of this cycle on governance, policy implementation, and national growth.
5. Propose integrated policy solutions for leadership reform and societal value reorientation.

1.4 Research Questions

1. What are the historical roots and manifestations of political corruption in Nigeria?
2. How has the desire for instant wealth shaped societal attitudes and behavior in Nigeria?
3. In what ways do political corruption and mass value disorientation reinforce each other?
4. What are the implications of this dual phenomenon for Nigeria's development?
5. What sustainable policy measures can address both elite corruption and societal value decay?

1.5 Scope of the Study

This study focuses on Nigeria's political and socio-cultural landscape from 1999 to the present democratic era, examining the interplay between political corruption and societal value orientation. It limits itself to federal and state-level political behavior, youth subcultures (especially relating to cybercrime and political violence), and public perceptions of success and leadership. While examples from the military era may be referenced for historical context, the primary emphasis is on contemporary democratic governance and its challenges.

1.6 Significance of the Study

This study is significant because it offers a dual-lens approach to understanding Nigeria's underdevelopment by linking political corruption at the elite level with value disorientation at the grassroots. Existing literature often treats these problems in isolation. By exploring their synergy, this study contributes to a deeper understanding of the structural and cultural foundations of Nigeria's stagnation. The findings will be relevant to policymakers, development practitioners, civil society actors, educators, and youth-focused organizations committed to national transformation and ethical leadership.

1.7 Structure of the Study

The study is structured into five chapters. Chapter One introduces the research problem, objectives,

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questions, and significance. Chapter Two reviews relevant literature and theoretical frameworks. Chapter Three outlines the research methodology. Chapter Four presents data, analysis, and discussion of findings. Chapter Five concludes the study with policy recommendations and suggestions for further research.

2.1 LITERATURE REVIEW

Understanding the complex relationship between political corruption and instant wealth aspiration in Nigeria requires a comprehensive examination of existing scholarship across multiple academic disciplines, including political science, sociology, economics, and cultural studies. Over the years, political corruption has been identified as one of the most pervasive obstacles to Nigeria's development. Scholars have explored how corruption in leadership undermines governance, drains public resources, weakens institutions, and erodes public trust. It is widely acknowledged that leadership failure rooted in self-interest and impunity plays a significant role in perpetuating poverty and inequality. Parallel to this is the growing concern about the rising culture of materialism and the get-rich-quick mentality within Nigerian society. Increasingly, citizens especially youths are becoming more focused on acquiring wealth rapidly, often through unethical or illegal means. Social media, celebrity culture, and the perceived success of corrupt politicians and elites have contributed to the normalization of wealth without regard for the source or process of acquisition. This has led to a decline in societal values such as hard work, integrity, and delayed gratification. What is missing in much of the existing literature, however, is a focused analysis of the interplay between these two dimensions. Few studies have critically examined how corrupt political leadership influences societal behavior, or how public tolerance and admiration for ill-gotten wealth serve to reinforce elite corruption. The two are often treated as separate issues, despite their deeply interconnected nature. Therefore, this review seeks not only to define and conceptualize political corruption, instant wealth aspiration, and

underdevelopment but also to analyze the theoretical and empirical works that examine how these forces operate in tandem. The goal is to highlight the cyclical relationship that sustains Nigeria's underdevelopment and identify the research gap this study intends to fill. To establish a clear analytical foundation for this study, it is essential to define the key concepts political corruption, instant wealth aspiration, and underdevelopment as they form the core of the research inquiry.

2.2 Conceptual Clarifications

Political corruption refers to the abuse or misuse of public office, authority, or power for personal or private gain. This may include bribery, embezzlement of public funds, nepotism, patronage, electoral fraud, and the manipulation of public policies or resources for self-interest. In the Nigerian context, political corruption has become systemic, deeply embedded in governance practices, and widely perceived as a norm rather than a deviation. It distorts public administration, diverts resources from essential development projects, and undermines institutional credibility and public trust. Instant wealth aspiration, also known as the "get-rich-quick syndrome," describes a societal inclination to acquire wealth rapidly, often by bypassing conventional processes of education, entrepreneurship, or hard work. This mentality is fueled by the visible success of corrupt politicians, entertainers, internet fraudsters, and others who appear to attain wealth without accountability. In Nigeria, this culture has permeated youth consciousness and increasingly shapes their value systems and career choices, undermining the social fabric and devaluing honest labour. Underdevelopment, as used in this study, refers to a condition characterized by persistent poverty, unemployment, inadequate infrastructure, weak institutions, and low human development indicators despite the country's natural and human resource endowments. It reflects a failure of governance, strategic planning, and value-based leadership. In Nigeria, underdevelopment is not merely economic it is also social, institutional, and

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moral. Together, these concepts form a triadic relationship where corrupt leadership fuels societal obsession with wealth, while that obsession, in turn, legitimizes and reinforces corruption trapping the nation in a self-perpetuating cycle of stagnation and moral decay.

2.2.1 Political Corruption

Political corruption refers to the abuse of public office for private gain. It includes embezzlement, bribery, nepotism, electoral manipulation, and policy capture by vested interests. According to Nye (1967), corruption "behaviour which deviates from the formal duties of a public role because of private-regarding pecuniary or status gains" is detrimental to institutional integrity and governance effectiveness. In Nigeria, political corruption has become systemic, normalized, and deeply embedded in the ruling elite.

2.2.2 Instant Wealth Syndrome

Instant wealth syndrome refers to a societal obsession with sudden riches, often through illegitimate or unethical means. It is characterized by the glorification of material success over integrity, hard work, or merit. This cultural shift encourages young people to pursue wealth by any means ritual practices, cyber fraud (Yahoo Yahoo), political thuggery, or scams believing that social prestige stems from financial acquisition rather than value contribution.

2.2.3 Underdevelopment

Underdevelopment refers to a persistent condition of poverty, low productivity, infrastructural decay and institutional weakness despite a country's resource endowment. Scholars such as Rodney (1972) argue that underdevelopment is not merely the absence of development but the result of systemic exploitation, poor leadership, and internal contradictions that stifle progress.

2.3 Political Corruption in Nigeria: A Historical Overview

Political corruption in Nigeria dates back to the First Republic but became more institutionalized during military regimes, particularly under Generals Babangida and Abacha. Corruption worsened with the return to civilian rule in 1999, as democratic structures were hijacked by rent-seeking elites. Studies by Ribadu (2006) and Adebawo & Obadare (2011) reveal how political offices became avenues for personal enrichment rather than public service. The monetization of politics, weak anti-corruption institutions, and lack of accountability perpetuate this trend. The Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) and the Independent Corrupt Practices Commission (ICPC) have made progress, but their efforts are often undermined by political interference, selective prosecution, and judicial bottlenecks.

2.4 The Rise of Instant Wealth Culture in Nigerian Society

The cultural obsession with wealth has grown rapidly in the 21st century, exacerbated by economic hardship, unemployment, and the visibility of corrupt elites who attain riches without consequences. Nigerian music, films, and social media increasingly promote luxury lifestyles, reinforcing the idea that money is the ultimate measure of success. According to Ogundiya (2009), the youth no longer aspire to professional excellence but to overnight wealth, often through cybercrime, fraudulent schemes, and rituals. The failure of the state to provide basic opportunities for economic mobility has further deepened this trend. A generation disillusioned by leadership failure sees illegal wealth as a rational response to a rigged system.

2.5 The Nexus Between Political Corruption and Instant Wealth Obsession

There is a dangerous synergy between elite corruption and mass value disorientation. Leaders model unethical behavior by looting public funds, manipulating elections, and escaping punishment. Citizens observe this impunity and replicate it in

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their own spheres, rationalizing their conduct as survival tactics. Scholars such as Ekeh (1975) and Aiyede (2006) argue that Nigeria's public realm has been captured by a "primordial logic," where loyalty and self-enrichment override public service and civic ethics. The normalization of both top-level corruption and grassroots misconduct creates a culture where integrity is seen as weakness, and development becomes secondary to self-enrichment. This cycle undermines national development by eroding trust, distorting policy priorities, and discouraging foreign and domestic investment.

2.6 Impacts on National Development

The consequences of this dual crisis are profound:

Governance Failure: Corruption reduces state capacity to deliver essential services.

Youth Disengagement: Instant wealth mentality discourages education and entrepreneurship.

Insecurity: Political thuggery and criminality grow in a climate where illegal wealth is rewarded.

Economic Distortion: Misallocation of resources and loss of investor confidence.

Moral Erosion: Ethical values are devalued, weakening national cohesion and trust.

UNDP (2021) reports that Nigeria loses over \$18 billion annually to corruption, while youth unemployment hovers above 40%, feeding into a volatile and unproductive environment.

2.7 Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored on two interrelated theories Social Learning Theory and Institutional Decay Theory to explain the cyclical relationship between political corruption, instant wealth aspiration, and underdevelopment in Nigeria. Social Learning Theory, developed by Albert Bandura (1977), posits that individuals acquire behaviors, attitudes, and values through observation and imitation of role models, particularly those in positions of power or influence. In the Nigerian context,

political elites often serve as public figures whose conduct significantly shapes societal norms. When leaders accumulate wealth illicitly and face no consequences, citizens especially the youth may internalize these behaviors as acceptable or even aspirational. Over time, the normalization of corrupt conduct at the top encourages a societal shift toward unethical practices such as fraud, bribery, and other shortcuts to wealth. The theory helps explain why corruption is not only widespread but also socially reproduced within the fabric of Nigerian society. Institutional Decay Theory complements this by focusing on how persistent corruption leads to the weakening and eventual dysfunction of state institutions. Institutions such as the judiciary, police, legislature, and civil service are designed to uphold transparency, accountability, and development. However, when these institutions are repeatedly compromised by corrupt practices, their legitimacy and efficiency decline. Public trust erodes, rule of law becomes arbitrary, and service delivery collapses. As institutional decay sets in, citizens lose faith in formal channels and may resort to informal or illicit methods to achieve personal goals, further reinforcing the culture of corruption. Together, these theories provide a comprehensive framework for understanding how elite behavior and societal response mutually reinforce one another. This cyclical interaction not only sustains underdevelopment but also creates significant barriers to reform, accountability, and national transformation.

2.7.1 The Theory of Political Settlements

This theory explains how the distribution of power among elites affects the functioning of institutions. In Nigeria, elite consensus often protects corrupt practices, ensuring impunity and distorting public policy in favor of entrenched interests.

2.7.2 Anomie Theory (Merton, 1938)

This sociological theory explains how societal norms break down when legitimate means to success are blocked. In Nigeria, widespread

poverty and unemployment create a fertile ground for deviant behavior such as fraud and ritualism as alternative means to achieve success.

2.7.3 The Rights-Based Approach to Development

This approach argues that development is a matter of human rights, including the right to good governance, transparency, and participation. When citizens are denied these rights due to corruption and misrule, underdevelopment becomes inevitable.

2.8 Empirical Review

Empirical studies have consistently highlighted a strong correlation between political corruption and societal dysfunction in Nigeria. Leadership corruption not only weakens institutional frameworks but also fosters public cynicism and disengagement from democratic processes. Scholars such as Achebe (1983) argue that the root of Nigeria's problem is the failure of leadership, which has created a climate where dishonesty and self-interest are rewarded over integrity and public service. Daniel Jordan Smith (2007), in his ethnographic work, observes how corruption has become embedded in everyday life, turning into a "culture" that shapes social relations and expectations. The visibility of corrupt leaders who face no repercussions sends a dangerous message to citizens especially youth that unethical behavior is a viable path to success. This has contributed to the rise in cybercrime, political thuggery, and financial fraud. Ojukwu and Shopeju (2010) also noted that societal tolerance and even admiration for ill-gotten wealth fuel a feedback loop that strengthens corrupt practices among elites. Additionally, studies by Uche (2018) reveal how pop culture and social media glamorize wealth, regardless of its source, reinforcing a value system that prioritizes riches over responsibility. These findings support the claim that corruption and instant wealth aspiration jointly sustain underdevelopment in Nigeria. Several studies have linked corruption and underdevelopment in

Nigeria. For instance, Transparency International (2023) ranks Nigeria among the most corrupt countries globally. A study by ActionAid (2019) found that 62% of Nigerian youth believe wealth matters more than how it is acquired. Similarly, research by the Centre for Democracy and Development (CDD) reveals a growing tolerance for corruption among the youth who view it as a rational means of survival. However, few studies explore the interconnectedness of political corruption and societal value collapse as mutually reinforcing dynamics. This research seeks to fill that gap.

2.9 Gaps in the Literature

While extensive literature exists on corruption and youth misconduct, there is limited scholarly engagement with how these two forces reinforce each other to entrench underdevelopment. There is also a lack of policy-oriented studies that propose integrated solutions addressing both elite and grassroots ethical collapse.

3.0 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

This chapter outlines the methodology adopted for the study. It discusses the research design, population of the study, sampling techniques, data sources, data collection instruments, methods of data analysis, and ethical considerations. The goal is to ensure the research process is transparent, reliable, and replicable.

3.2 METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a qualitative-descriptive research design aimed at exploring the complex relationship between political corruption, instant wealth aspiration, and underdevelopment in Nigeria. The qualitative approach is appropriate due to the exploratory nature of the topic and the need to interpret patterns, perceptions, and meanings derived from social and political behaviors. The research relies primarily on secondary data sources, including peer-reviewed journal articles, books, government policy documents, corruption

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perception reports, public speeches, newspaper articles, and verified media content. These sources were selected to provide a comprehensive view of Nigeria's governance practices, institutional performance, and public attitudes toward wealth acquisition. The period of focus is Nigeria's Fourth Republic (1999–present), chosen for its relevance to democratic leadership, the expansion of media and digital influence, and the intensification of both corruption and the get-rich-quick mentality. Content analysis was used to identify recurring themes and narratives related to corruption and social values, as reflected in both elite behavior and popular culture. By analyzing how documented instances of political corruption interact with societal attitudes over time, the study aims to develop a grounded understanding of the mutually reinforcing cycle that sustains underdevelopment. Ethical considerations were observed by ensuring the credibility and reliability of sources

3.3 Research Design

This study adopts a qualitative research design, specifically descriptive and exploratory in nature. The descriptive aspect helps in capturing the patterns of political corruption and societal obsession with instant wealth, while the exploratory component probes the link between these patterns and Nigeria's persistent underdevelopment. The qualitative approach is suitable because it allows for deeper analysis of attitudes, perceptions, and institutional behaviors that cannot be quantified adequately through numbers alone.

3.4 Population of the Study

The population of the study comprises:

Political stakeholders (government officials, policy analysts, and anti-corruption agents), civil society representatives, Youth (particularly those involved in tech/startups, students, or at-risk groups such as cybercrime offenders), Academics in political science, development studies, and sociology. These groups were selected because they are either

participants in, or observers of, the socio-political and economic processes under investigation.

3.5 Sampling Technique and Sample Size

The study adopts purposive sampling to select respondents who possess relevant knowledge or experiences related to the themes of corruption and wealth culture. A total of 20 to 30 key informants are targeted for in-depth interviews and focus group discussions across different sectors and geopolitical zones to reflect diverse perspectives.

Criteria for selection include: Professional or lived experience with corruption or youth economic behavior, Expertise in governance, development policy, or youth culture, Willingness to participate in confidential, in-depth interviews.

3.6 Sources of Data

The study utilizes both primary and secondary data.

- Primary data includes in-depth interviews and focus group discussions with selected participants.
- Secondary data is sourced from academic journals, government reports, NGO publications, media reports, court cases, EFCC/ICPC records, and global corruption indexes such as those from Transparency International and UNDP.

This triangulation of sources ensures a robust and comprehensive analysis.

3.7 Instruments for Data Collection

Interview Guide: A semi-structured guide will be used to conduct one-on-one interviews, covering topics such as personal encounters with corruption, perceptions of success, and views on Nigeria's leadership crisis.

Focus Group Protocol: Designed for youth discussions around societal expectations, economic pressures, and moral compromises.

Document Analysis Framework: A checklist for analyzing secondary data on corruption cases, development trends, and youth culture patterns.

3.8 Method of Data Analysis

Data will be analyzed using thematic content analysis. After transcription, responses will be coded and categorized into key themes such as:

Patterns of political corruption, Youth perceptions of success and wealth, Impact of leadership on societal values, Institutional weaknesses and underdevelopment linkages.

The NVivo software may be used to manage and visualize patterns within qualitative data. Findings will be interpreted against the backdrop of the theoretical frameworks discussed in Chapter Two.

3.9 Validity and Reliability

To ensure validity:

Questions in the interview guide will be reviewed by experts in political science and development studies.

Pre-testing of the instruments will be conducted to ensure clarity and relevance.

Reliability will be enhanced through:

Consistency in the application of interview protocols,

Triangulation of data from different sources,

Cross-checking of responses during data transcription and analysis.

3.10 Ethical Considerations

The study adheres to standard ethical research protocols:

Informed Consent: Participants will be briefed about the study and their rights before engagement.

Anonymity and Confidentiality: Personal identifiers will be removed from transcripts; data will be stored securely.

Voluntary Participation: Respondents can withdraw at any time without consequence.

Avoidance of Harm: The study avoids sensitive political naming or accusations that could endanger participants.

Ethical approval will be sought from the appropriate university or institutional review board before fieldwork begins.

4.0 DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS

4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents and analyzes the primary data collected through interviews and focus group discussions. The data is thematically organized in line with the research objectives and analyzed using qualitative content analysis. Key insights are supported with direct quotations from respondents, ensuring that the voices of participants reflect the lived realities behind political corruption and instant wealth obsession in Nigeria. The themes reflect patterns that emerged across different participant groups, including public officials, youth, civil society actors, and academics.

4.2 Socio-Demographic Profile of Respondents

A total of 26 individuals participated in this study, including 6 government officials (federal and state level), 5 academics and development practitioners, 8 youth representatives (students, entrepreneurs, ex-fraud offenders), 4 civil society actors and activists, 3 members of anti-corruption agencies (EFCC/ICPC). Participants ranged in age from 21 to 63 years, with gender and regional balance considered to capture diverse perspectives.

4.3 Theme One: Entrenched Nature of Political Corruption

Respondents unanimously agreed that corruption in Nigeria is systemic and institutionalized. Government officials and civil society leaders cited numerous examples where political actors embezzled public funds without repercussions. "Political office is seen as an investment. Once someone wins an election, their focus shifts from

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governance to recovering campaign expenses with profit.” [Civil Society Representative] A former legislative aide revealed that even budget allocations are often influenced by bribes and personal favors, distorting national priorities. Corruption was viewed not just as individual misconduct but as a networked practice involving politicians, contractors, civil servants, and sometimes the judiciary.

4.4 Theme Two: Youth Obsession with Quick Wealth

Youth participants expressed frustration with Nigeria's economic system, citing unemployment, poor education, and lack of opportunity as reasons many resort to unethical means of acquiring wealth. “We are told to go to school and work hard, but the politicians stealing billions are our role models. If they don't face consequences, why should I suffer?” [Male, 26, university graduate] Some youth admitted that fraud (Yahoo Yahoo) was normalized within their communities, and success was measured by visible wealth rather than its source. Participants noted the role of social media, which glamorizes luxury and often features celebrities or influencers with questionable income sources.

4.5 Theme Three: Elite Behavior as a Model for Societal Decay

A recurring pattern in the interviews was the trickle-down effect of elite corruption on ordinary citizens. Multiple respondents emphasized that societal moral collapse is not spontaneous it mirrors the behavior of those in power. “When governors build mansions and fly private jets after 4 years in office, it tells the average Nigerian that fraud pays. The elite set the tone, and the rest follow.” [University Lecturer, Political Science] Participants emphasized that the disconnect between leadership and accountability encourages imitation. Political thuggery, electoral violence, and ritual killings among youth were framed as survival mechanisms in a corrupt system.

4.6 Theme Four: Consequences for National Development

Respondents identified several consequences of the corruption-wealth obsession nexus:

Erosion of institutional trust: Citizens no longer believe in government processes or reforms.

Brain drain: Educated youth are migrating due to frustration with systemic failure.

Low productivity and innovation: People focus on shortcuts rather than innovation or entrepreneurship.

Security threats: Banditry, cultism, and fraud have become livelihood options. “This isn't just about money it's about the breakdown of ethics. Even churches and mosques now celebrate corrupt donors. We've lost the moral compass.” [Development Practitioner]

Participants agreed that this moral collapse significantly weakens development initiatives, as policies are undermined from both the top (through looting) and the bottom (through non-compliance and cynicism).

4.7 Theme Five: Strategies for Breaking the Cycle

When asked about solutions, participants proposed a two-pronged approach:

1. Leadership Reform: Enforcing accountability, strengthening anti-corruption institutions, and ensuring transparency in political finance.
2. Societal Value Reorientation: Integrating ethics and civic education into school curricula, media campaigns promoting merit, and investment in youth empowerment schemes.

“Corruption is not just a legal problem; it's cultural. We need to rebuild our value system as a nation.” [ICPC Official] Many emphasized the need for credible role models, systemic punishment for corrupt officials, and economic inclusion for youth to reduce desperation.

4.8 Summary of Key Findings

Political corruption in Nigeria is deeply entrenched and enabled by weak institutions.

Youth are increasingly driven by a desire for quick wealth due to a breakdown of meritocratic values and lack of economic opportunities.

There is a strong correlation between elite impunity and the normalization of fraud and crime among the populace.

Underdevelopment persists not just because of resource mismanagement, but due to the collapse of national ethics and integrity.

Effective solutions must address both the supply side (corrupt elites) and the demand side (public complicity and value erosion).

5.0 SUMMARY, CONCLUSION, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Summary of the Study

This study explored the interconnectedness between political corruption and the societal obsession with instant wealth as core drivers of Nigeria's persistent underdevelopment. It was prompted by the observation that despite decades of reforms, Nigeria continues to grapple with poverty, infrastructural decay, unemployment, insecurity, and institutional weakness. Chapter one provided the background, outlining how elite-level corruption and grassroots moral decay have created a self-sustaining cycle of stagnation. Chapter Two reviewed the literature, identifying the conceptual and theoretical foundations of political corruption, wealth obsession, and underdevelopment, while drawing on theories such as anomie and political settlements. Chapter Three described the qualitative methodology used purposive sampling, interviews, and thematic analysis. Chapter Four presented and analyzed data from multiple stakeholders, highlighting key patterns and insights. The study found that political corruption is normalized at the elite level, encouraging mass emulation and justifying unethical behaviors such

as fraud, political thuggery, and ritual killings among the youth. This interaction has significantly eroded trust in governance, weakened institutional effectiveness, and distorted national development goals.

5.2 Findings and Analysis

The findings of this study reinforce the understanding that political corruption in Nigeria is deeply intertwined with societal behavior and cultural values. Corruption among leaders is not an isolated phenomenon but part of a broader culture that celebrates shortcuts to success and prioritizes wealth accumulation over integrity and hard work. This normalization of unethical behavior disables meritocratic principles, undermining systems that reward competence, accountability, and fairness. As corrupt practices become widespread and accepted, they fuel the growth of criminal enterprises, including fraud, money laundering, and cybercrime, which further destabilize economic and social structures. The resultant erosion of rule of law weakens institutions responsible for development and governance, creating a permissive environment for continued malfeasance. Moreover, the pervasive acceptance of instant wealth aspiration reduces public participation in civic duties and diminishes trust in government and legal institutions. When citizens perceive that corruption is unavoidable and that success depends on connections or illicit means, their motivation to engage in democratic processes or long-term economic planning declines. This vicious cycle significantly hampers Nigeria's ability to achieve sustainable development. Efforts to improve governance and development are continually thwarted by the mutual reinforcement between elite corruption and societal values that tolerate or even encourage unethical wealth acquisition. Breaking this cycle requires addressing both leadership accountability and public value reorientation.

The study reveals that political corruption in Nigeria remains widespread and largely unpunished, particularly among high-ranking

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officials. Elites who embezzle public funds or abuse power are often shielded by legal loopholes, political connections, or weak enforcement institutions. This lack of accountability creates a perception that success is primarily measured by wealth, regardless of how it is obtained. As a result, many ordinary Nigerians, especially youth, are influenced to pursue wealth through unethical or illegal means, including fraud, cybercrime, and political patronage. The analysis also shows that this behavior is not confined to the elite class. Over time, the normalization of corruption has trickled down to everyday social interactions, where bribery, favoritism, and dishonesty are often viewed as necessary tools for survival. This societal moral compromise reinforces the actions of corrupt leaders, completing a vicious cycle. Furthermore, the findings indicate that this corruption-wealth mentality nexus significantly undermines development policies, weakens public institutions, and erodes the rule of law. Public trust in government diminishes, and genuine reform efforts are often met with skepticism or resistance. In essence, the study confirms that both elite misconduct and societal aspirations for instant wealth mutually reinforce each other, sustaining Nigeria's persistent underdevelopment and institutional failure.

5.3 Conclusion

The findings of this research confirm that Nigeria's development crisis is not merely economic or political, but deeply moral and systemic. The synergy between elite-level corruption and societal value disorientation creates a culture where illegality is rewarded, integrity is devalued, and development is deprioritized. Leaders by their actions or inaction model corruption while the masses emulate these patterns, believing that success depends on wealth regardless of its source. Consequently, any attempt to address Nigeria's underdevelopment must confront both leadership failure and the societal collapse of values. Structural reforms alone are insufficient unless they are complemented by value reorientation, credible leadership, and sustained investment in

youth empowerment. The cycle of impunity must be broken at both ends of the spectrum to foster national renewal.

5.4 Recommendations

This study concludes that the link between political corruption and instant wealth aspiration in Nigeria is both real and dangerously self-reinforcing. The mutually sustaining cycle between corrupt leadership and societal obsession with quick riches has created a formidable barrier to national development. Corrupt elites model unethical behavior that citizens, particularly youth, emulate, while public tolerance and admiration for ill-gotten wealth further legitimize corruption among leaders. To break this cycle, Nigeria must adopt a holistic and multi-faceted approach.

First, strengthening institutions to ensure accountability, transparency, and effective enforcement of anti-corruption laws is critical. Institutions such as the judiciary, anti-corruption agencies, and law enforcement must operate independently and efficiently to hold offenders accountable.

Second, the government and civil society should promote value reorientation through comprehensive civic education and sustained public campaigns that emphasize integrity, hard work, and patriotism. Changing societal attitudes is essential to reduce the allure of the get-rich-quick mentality.

Third, leadership reforms must be implemented to cultivate a culture of public service and ethical governance, with clear consequences for misconduct.

Finally, investment in youth development and job creation is necessary to address economic desperation that drives unethical wealth pursuits. By targeting both leadership and citizenry, Nigeria can begin to dismantle this vicious cycle and create a foundation for sustainable development and national progress.

The Nexus Between Political Corruption and Instant Wealth Aspiration: A Study of Their Contribution to Nigeria's Underdevelopment.

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